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www.health.ri.gov

Interim Health Advisory

Date: July 29, 2009
To: All Healthcare Providers
From: Director of Health, David R. Gifford, MD, MPH
Re: Information on H1N1 in RI

H1N1 Influenza activity has been downgraded from Regional to Local in Rhode Island. Officials still expect flu activity to increase this fall and continue through the winter. The Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) recommends that all Rhode Island healthcare providers utilize this time to examine and/or establish Continuity of Operations (COOP) plans. The expected increase in H1N1 illness and hospitalizations make it likely that your facility/practice may need to activate a COOP plan this fall.

Continuity of Operations(COOP) plans should be developed to prepare your facility/practice ahead of time for potential emergencies and disruptive events. A good COOP plan identifies the essential functions of the facility/practice and details methods for continuing these functions across a wide range of emergency situations. If your office does not have a COOP plan, take this time to put one together. If your office does have a COOP plan, use this opportunity to revisit your plan, fill in the missing pieces, and update it as needed.

Things to consider when developing or updating a COOP plan:

- **Essential workplace functions** Identify essential functions and the standard operating procedures necessary to support them. This will help you to organize your COOP plan so that these functions can continue during an emergency situation.
- **Telecommuting for staff** If this option is practical for your organization, ensure that information technology resources (staff members, equipment) can adequately support employees working from home.
- **Sick time policies** Employees may need to use sick time to care for family members or to obtain alternate childcare services for their children. Make sure you have a policy in place to address this.
- **Alternate staffing plans** Officials anticipate a 30%-50% attack rate for H1N1 flu this fall. A large percentage of your workforce may get sick and be unable to come to work. Consider cross training employees to allow coverage for sick employees. Establish a relationship with a temporary staffing agency if you have not already done so. Remember, at this time employees with flu-like symptoms must stay home for 7 days after symptoms begin or until they have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is **longer**. Expect that you may need longer-term coverage for sick employees this fall.
- **Customer relations** If many of your employees get sick this fall, you may need to make changes to your operating hours or services provided. Identify methods for communicating this information to your customers.
- **Communicate with vendors, contractors, and partners** The COOP plans of your business partners will affect your workplace, too. Even if your employees don't get sick, the organizations you work with may have to make changes this fall. Make sure you communicate with these partners early and often about plans for the fall.
- **Unions** If your workplace has unions, make sure that changes or policies incorporated into your COOP plan do not conflict with their rules and regulations.

Additional Resources

HEALTH at <http://www.health.ri.gov> ; H1N1 Information Line (M-F 8:30am- 4:30pm) 401-222-8022
CDC at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

WHO at <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>

To view clinical information in provider update dated 07/22/09, visit
<http://www.health.ri.gov/pandemicflu/ProviderAdvisory/ProviderUpdate072209.pdf>